

21<sup>st</sup> Ordinary Time B-2009: Floating with the Lord

In the second book of his science fiction trilogy, *Perelandra*, C. S. Lewis presents a Paradise being tempted by evil. But instead of painting a lush Garden of Eden, as the *Book of Genesis* paints, C. S. Lewis presents a planet with a huge sea on which there are floating islands. The waves on that planet are so large that the floating islands go up and down with the swell. Sometimes an entire island is on the bottom of the swell and the ocean is a wall. Anyone on the island would not be able to see anything other than the island or the sea. Sometimes an entire island is on top of the waves, and an inhabitant of the island could look out and see the world just as someone here on earth might see the world from the top of Pike's Peak or Mount Everest. Everything on *Perelandra* is beautiful. There are dolphin like fish in the sea that spout water the colors of the rainbow. The floating islands are lush and green. The fruit on the islands is so delicious that the first inclination one has after he or she takes a bite, is to eat some and then pick and hoard as much as possible.

An explorer from earth named Ransom lands on one of the islands on a trip to what he thinks is Venus. He finds far more than he expected. After adjusting to his island, Ransom notices off in the distant water a human form. As his island floats closer he sees that it is a woman traveling from island to island on the back of the dolphin like creatures. She is tall. She is beautiful. And she is green. He would later learn that she was Trindiri, the queen of the planet and with her husband the King, its only human inhabitants. All would seem to be ideal, but then Ransom sees a dragon flying through the skies. He realizes that this wonderful world is under attack by the forces of

evil. “Why do you sleep on this floating island?” the dragon  
**COME SPIRIT!!**

calls out to the beautiful green lady. “Because God has told us to trust in Him,” she responds. “But you would be much safer if you slept on solid land instead of a floating island,” the devil responds. “Look, over there is a continent. It doesn’t float, it just sits there. Why do you risk everything trusting in God. You should sleep on solid ground.” And so, C. S. Lewis presents the ancient quandary of man: To trust in what he or she sees or to trust in God. To trust in the spiritual which cannot be seen, or to trust in the physical which our eyes can focus on.

I won’t tell you the ending of Perelandra, because the C. S. Lewis trilogy is worth reading and reflecting on. Instead, I want you to consider this, the disciples of the Lord are presented in John 6 as on a Perelandra. They loved hearing the words of the Lord. They loved experiencing the warmth of His Presence. They had just eaten bread He multiplied. They had seen him heal people. They had heard about His Kingdom. What was even better, they had heard Him call them to be leaders in His Kingdom. But now Jesus had given them a teaching that demanded their absolute trust in Him, their absolute faith in Him, even though this teaching was completely against what their eyes, ears and senses were telling them. He told them that He was the Bread of Life. He told them that they needed to eat His Flesh and drink His Blood for them to have eternal life.

For some of the disciples, this was too hard to accept. They left the island of trust. They were convinced that the spiritual would not make such outlandish demands on their senses. They left Jesus and returned to their previous lives. The Twelve told Jesus what was happening. Perhaps they

were implying that Jesus tone down His teaching some. Maybe they were just pointing out that the Lord was losing followers.

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Whatever. The fact is that Jesus was not going to rescind a word. He came to make the spiritual real. He came to bring a reality to the world that was beyond the capacity of man to understand. He came to bring the Gifts of God that were far greater than man's fondest hopes. He would not compromise the truth. "Will you go, also, Peter," he asks the leader of his Twelve. "Lord, where can we go, you alone have the words of eternal life." And with that confession of faith, Peter stays on the floating island of hope and faith. He did not know with his senses how it is possible for Jesus to give His Body and Blood for the food they would need for the journey to God. Peter did not know with his senses, but he knew with his heart that all was beautiful with Jesus and that it would be infinitely foolish to trust in the senses rather than trust in the Lord.

And Jesus said in today's gospel, "It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is to no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

We are called to believe in the Lord, to trust in Him. We are called to stay on the floating island of faith rather than to trust in our own ability to make sense of the world. We are called to give an infinitely greater credence to the spiritual we cannot see over the material we can see. We are called to faith.

It is quite normal for us to go through periods of doubting the teachings of the Lord. It is normal for us to ask, "How is God only one, if the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit

is God?” It is quite normal for us to ask: “How can Jesus be both fully God and fully man?” It is quite normal for us to ask: “How can this bread and wine, material objects before the Mass, now be the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ?” It is quite

**COME SPIRIT!!**

normal for us to want to stand on the material world of our senses and ignore the new world of the spiritual.

When these types of doubts come to our mind, be they flashing through, or lingering and challenging us, we need to stop and consider the Gifts of the Lord. We need to reflect on our Savior, Jesus Christ. We reflect on the wonders He provides that are beyond our imagination, too good to be true, but, yes, they are true. We are children of God. We think about the peace that we have when we are united with Him and the chaos we have when we turn from Him. And, so, we trust completely in the Lord. We trust Him over our own senses. We trust that floating on the island of faith is infinitely better than standing on the material ground of physical senses. For what else can we do? Where else can we go? He alone has the words of eternal life.

And so we believe. We believe in that which we do not see. We believe in that which our human senses cannot reveal. We believe in the Lord, in His Love, and in His teaching. We believe that God exists for eternity in a Trinity of Persons. We believe that the Second Person of this Trinity became man to restore the spiritual to the physical, to restore man to his rightful place in the spiritual world, and we believe He gave us His Body and Blood, the Eucharist, as both an intimate sharing in His Presence and a union of all believers into the eternal swell of His love.

And we come to Church this Sunday and pray as we pray every day of our lives, we pray the prayer of the father of the epileptic boy in Mark 9:24 who Jesus asked, "Do you believe?" We join this man and pray, "I do believe, Lord, but help those parts of me that do not believe." We are human, yes,

**COME SPIRIT!!**

but we have been entrusted with the mystery of the Divine. We have been given the Gift of the Eucharist.

Floating on the island of faith is infinitely superior to clasp the deadly limitations of life without God, the limitations of the physical. When we float on the island of faith, we experience deeper and deeper revelations of God's Love. Sure, we are tempted to trust only our senses. We are tempted to stand on the material. We are tempted to limit ourselves to the here and now. We are human. But we are also spiritual. And deep within us, deep within every single one of us there is the Voice of Faith prodding us to exclaim with Peter, "I will not leave you Lord. You alone have the words of eternal life."

Today we pray, as we do everyday of our lives, for faith.